

The Hospital Library

EARLY hospital libraries existed, with one or two exceptions, in private mental hospitals only, while today sanatoria for tubercular patients, children's hospitals and municipal general hospitals are demanding not only books but libraries and library service.

Doctors and nurses returned from the army to their home towns, remembered the organized libraries and selected books, the bedside service, and the contented patients of war days and wondered why something of the sort would not work in city hospitals. Librarians who had served in the camps looked at the full shelves of their home libraries and remembered how much "the boys" had liked those books when they were sick. So one of these librarians went to the superintendents of the six general hospitals in his city and offered to start a "drive" for permanent collections of books for each hospital, lend books from the public library, and provide a hospital librarian from his staff who would visit the wards and carry books to the bed patients. Everyone was enthusiastic, six book wagons of the A. L. A. pattern were bought, and Sioux City became the proud pioneer in the new type of "group" library administration whereby the hospital and the public library combine to furnish books to patients. Many other

cities and towns have followed this plan with satisfactory results.

This "group" system is undoubtedly the better method of providing book service in small hospitals, but the "unit" plan as followed by McLean, Bloomingdale, and Shepard and Enoch Pratt Mental Hospitals and the Massachusetts General and Lakeside Hospitals for general and surgical cases, is without question the ideal one for large hospitals which can afford it. Each of these hospitals has its own medical and general libraries, funds for buying new books and a librarian attached to the staff. Lakeside Hospital has also a very fine collection of books on nursing and allied subjects for the use of its training school, and it draws heavily upon the Cleveland Public Library for supplementary reading, talks to nurses on books, and co-operation in every way along these lines. At McLean Hospital, before the war disrupted the training school, courses on books and reading and on fine arts were given by the librarian to the nurses as a part of the curriculum.

As the value of hospital libraries is now fully acknowledged, their future seems assured. The superintendent of one general hospital remarked: "These libraries are wonderful things for the patients. We doctors used to think that when we had performed a successful operation our duty was ended. If the patient died of homesickness after it, that was none of our concern. We knew that a contented mind was

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half the battle, but we took little pains to make him contented. Now we consider that the hospital must look after the mental health of a patient during convalescence, and we have learned that wholesome books do more than almost any other one thing to keep him happy and help him get well."

If there were space enough I might tell of the book service in one of these big general hospitals; of the children eager for picture books and the story hour; of the foreigner, whose eyes light up pathetically at sight of his own language on the printed page; of the student enabled to keep on with his classes through books borrowed from school or public library; of the rough mechanic who begs for an Alger one day and an abstruse book on machinery the next; of the sailor who fretted for the smell of salt water till Conrad's *Nigger of the Narcissus* and a book of Japan were put into his hands; of the blind man, tossing restlessly, lips moving, face tense and strained, hands clutching the rods of his cot, who relaxed completely when *Treasure Island* in braille was given him. The work is so intensely human, so full of pathos and humor, there is little wonder that librarians engaged in this service are an enthusiastic group.—From *The Hospital Library*, edited by E. Kathleen Jones, formerly Librarian McLean Hospital, Waverly, Mass. Now printing. (Price, \$2.25.)

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A sunny corner of the Children's Department of the Boston City Hospital, showing library service.